Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project

The Santa Fe National Forest is embarking on an open **public process** to analyze a project **to restore forest and watershed health in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains** outside Santa Fe.

Managers will conduct a **thorough environmental analysis with multiple opportunities for public engagement and input** into the proposal and alternatives.

Project Goals

The goals of the project are to **improve the health of a priority landscape** and **increase its resiliency to future disturbances** by:

- Restoring frequent-fire forests to their historic natural condition
- Reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire and protecting critical infrastructure
- Improving wildlife habitat
- Improving watershed conditions

The proposal would utilize **prescribed fire** as the **main tool to restore fire resiliency** to these frequent-fire forests, with **small-tree thinning** as needed to **allow fire to play its natural role** in the ecosystem. **Up to 21,000 acres would be treated with noncommercial thinning followed by prescribed burning, and up to 22,000 acres would be treated with prescribed burning only.**

The proposal would **decommission up to 20 miles of old roads** and **restore stream channels on up to 557 acres** for native fish and plants. The proposal will ensure **protections for wild- life, soils, archaeological sites and other resources**.

Science-Based

The project is supported by top researchers and scientists who have been studying the history of wildfire in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Their work with tree-ring fire scars shows **unequivocal evidence of frequent fires going back hundreds of years.**

Research shows that historically **low- to moderate-intensity wildfires** burned through the ponderosa pine and dry mixed conifer forests **every seven to 15 years**.

Fire is a keystone process in these forests, part of a natural cycle that removes leaf and needle litter and creates space for a lush understory of grasses and other plants, providing rich wildlife habitat and improving forest and watershed health**.**

The exclusion of fire from this landscape since the late 1800s has created **dense, overgrown forests** with an **unnaturally high build-up of fuel, increasing the risk of catastrophic fire** and insect and disease outbreaks.

Building on Success

The project builds on the **successful collaboration between the Santa Fe National Forest, the City of Santa Fe, and many other partners** to restore fire to its natural role in the **Santa Fe Municipal Watershed**. Thanks to nearly 20 years of treatment, the Watershed continues to provide almost **half of the drinking water for Santa Fe** with some of **the cleanest, cheapest water in the West.**

Why This Work Matters

The threats are more than theoretical, and **the time to act is now.** Communities in and around the Santa Fe National Forest have experienced the **devastating impacts of catastrophic megafires** and the **drastic erosion and flooding** that follow, which pose a serious hazard to human health and safety and threaten irreplaceable resources and infrastructure.

Our partners in the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition understand that **restoring the health and vitality of our forests** is critical for **the future of our communities.** The Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project will help us **sustain the benefits that flow from these mountains** – water, wildlife, recreation, traditional uses and special places.